

Contributions

THE GOSPEL PREACHER

J. L. GILLIN

In the wilderness of Judea near the Jordan centuries ago stood a man, clothed in commonest garb, of humble birth, living a hermit's life, who lifted up his prophetic voice and rent the desert stillness till its echo was heard in every town and village of Judea, with the cry, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." No oily-tongued flatterer was he; no preacher of platitudes; no prophet of smooth things, but a voice the like of which had not been heard ringing its cry out over the Judean hills since the words of the last prophet had been stilled in death four centuries before.

His first cry was a reproach for sin—"Repent." With an iteration that would not be silenced and an energy that stirred to action he clung to that cry. He spoke it, moreover, to a religious people. Too often we have done injustice to the Jews of the first century in imagining them a bad people. On the contrary, they were, according to our standards even, a good people. Religious, attentive to church duties, scrupulous in regard to the law. Bigots to be sure, selfish too, in that they "looked out for number one," and in that they had little mercy for the classes below them, and cared nothing for the outcasts and helpless. But such there are even in our churches today. And it was to these he came,—this rude ascetic of the desert,—with the cry "Repent." He reproached the zealous Pharisees and the lazy, genteel, self-satisfied Sadducees with, "O, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He rebuked their self justification and self-complacency by the warning, "And begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father, for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." And surprised those who convicted in their own consciences, rushed to his baptism by saying, "An empty repentance is not enough, nor will baptism help you without real repentance; now bring forth fruits meet for repentance." To their question, "What shall we do then?" he replied, "Think not that righteousness is wholly not doing wrong. It is vastly more. He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat let him do likewise." To the publicans, or as we should say, assessors, he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you," as they were used to do that they might stick the balance in their own pockets. To the soldiers, for even they brutal and hard as they were, had been caught in the awful conviction

of sin which his preaching occasioned, he said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." And such a message preached with such fearlessness; such evident knowledge of conditions as they were and as they should be; such practical application of his message to specific sins in high and low brought the multitudes to his baptism and prepared the way for a Greater. Such a preacher was the herald of the Gospel Preacher. At the latter let us look also.

Not in the desert of Judea, but in Galilee in its crowded cities, along its busy highways, beside and upon its beautiful lake is heard His voice first. What does He say? Does he speak to the people with words of honeyed sweetness, forgetful of their sins? Listen! "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Verily never man spoke like this man either in clearness of expression, beauty and power of diction and fierceness of invective and denunciation. But, let us as preachers, while we linger over His beautiful, sweet, and profound words, not forget such sayings as these: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "This people's heart is waxed gross, their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes they have closed." "O, ye hypocrites." "A wicked and adulterous generation." "Verily I say unto you the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." To the religious leaders of the people He cried, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell." To be influential members of the nation, yea, His own nation of which he had come to be king, He said, "Ye compass sea and land to make some proselyte and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." And standing face to face with them, when the obstinacy of their unbelief and selfish interests culminated in that final break between Him and them, after they in their malignant hate had allied all classes with themselves to secure His downfall, He burst forth in that awful passage of denunciation and woeful warning found in Matt. 23. Read even in this far away time, it sounds like the sentence of eternal doom. What must it have been to hear it fall from those living lips, in tones of that voice, re-enforced by those flashing, indignant eyes, that outraged, pitying, pleading, wrathful countenance, and driven home to smitten consciences by Him in whom there was no sin! That was the Gospel Preacher. No thought in him of whether His sermon was making an impression, no doubting contemplation of what its results might be to Him, only the firm, swift, fiery convictions of a great pure soul aching to see a nobler humanity and stung at the sight of stubborn dishonesty.

Brethren, how many of us ever follow either of these preachers? I hold that the gospel preacher today will approximate in matter and method the Gospel Preacher of that long ago. The gospel ministry of today is not suffering from a paucity of beautiful sermons, profound philosophy, or flights of empty oratory. Beauty, philosophy and oratory are all useful. But just now the most urgent need of the church, in our humble judgment, is preachers who (1) see the truth, (2) are not too cowardly to preach it, tho it put them out of their pulpit, and (3) love the church and sinners so much that they will dare to tell them the truth, willing to die for truth, or, what is infinitely harder sometimes, to live for it on a very meagre allowance. And such too many are not. Let us follow Christ.

EMOTION IN RELIGION

LOUIS S. BAUMAN

To the calm clear eye that is able to penetrate deep down under the surface of things, nothing seen is so appalling as the mighty unbelief in the church of today. Vast multitudes assemble Sabbath after Sabbath to hear of mercy, hope, and judgment to come—to listen to the distant mutterings of a great day when the trumpet blast shall call them to account and their destiny shall be proclaimed for ever, and ever, and ever. The Word of God being true, what thing under the sun is of so vast importance as that Word,—that law for the everlasting future.

It is Sabbath, and here comes for worship the throng which professes that the word is true. They enter the sacred house of God, and what scene do we behold! From the laugh and giggle of silly girls to the knit brow of the statesman revolving in his brain some perplexing question of government, we search and find a few whose thoughts seem centered on things unseen—, blessed and true. The song, the prayer, the sermon, makes little change in the scene, and the "Amen!" following the benediction is the gong signalling a rush of the throng back into the busy scenes and the fretting cares of the world. The earnest, devout man of God, is struck with the apparent insincerity and ponders the question, "Do they believe it?" What we see is an effect to which there must be a cause. I believe there are two great causes for this unbelief.

First, the church has suffered being made a place of entertainment for a class of people who never did believe. A recent Chicago newspaper despaired because religious observances in fashionable circles seem to be decaying. *Pretenders!* A good sign is that, and no cause for despair. That which is untrue must die. Fashion would hardly enter the stable with her jewels, and soil her